

The History of the Heber Creeper

The history of the Heber Creeper goes back to the arrival of the railroad in Utah in 1869. The date everyone remembers is May 10, 1869. On that date at Promontory Point, the Central Pacific and the Union Pacific Railways met. Not long before that the Union Pacific which came from the east, completed its line to as far as Ogden, on March 8, 1869.

Even before the arrival of the railway there was a battle between the Mormons and the railroad builders as to what route the line would take. The Mormons wanted it to come through Salt Lake City, but the route west of Salt Lake and south of the Great Salt Lake was not as good as the northern route. After the railway people made the decision to use the northern route, the next battle was where the main hub for the line would be; in Corinne, a gentile hangout, or in the larger Mormon community of Ogden. The Union Pacific hub was finally placed in Ogden. But since Ogden was north of the capital of Salt Lake City it was decided to run a branch line south to service the majority of Utah's population.

The thought of the railroad coming to the state was met with mixed feelings. The railroads would bring economic prosperity, but a lot of non-Mormons and outsiders as well. As you might expect, the Mormons wanted to keep as many *gentiles* out of the state as possible. In the end they cooperated with the railway companies to build the system, but the agreement reached between Brigham Young and the Union Pacific stipulated that most of the work of grading and laying tracks in Utah be done with Mormon labor. To hire workers to complete the line the Union Pacific contracted Mormons under Brigham Young. As it turned out, the Mormons built the line, but the UP was strapped for funds, and couldn't make some of the payments in cash. So it was decided to make payments in rolling stock.

This set well with Brigham Young because with their own workers and the materials they could build their own railroad from Ogden to Salt Lake, which they eventually did. Young paid off the workers in part with tithing credits.

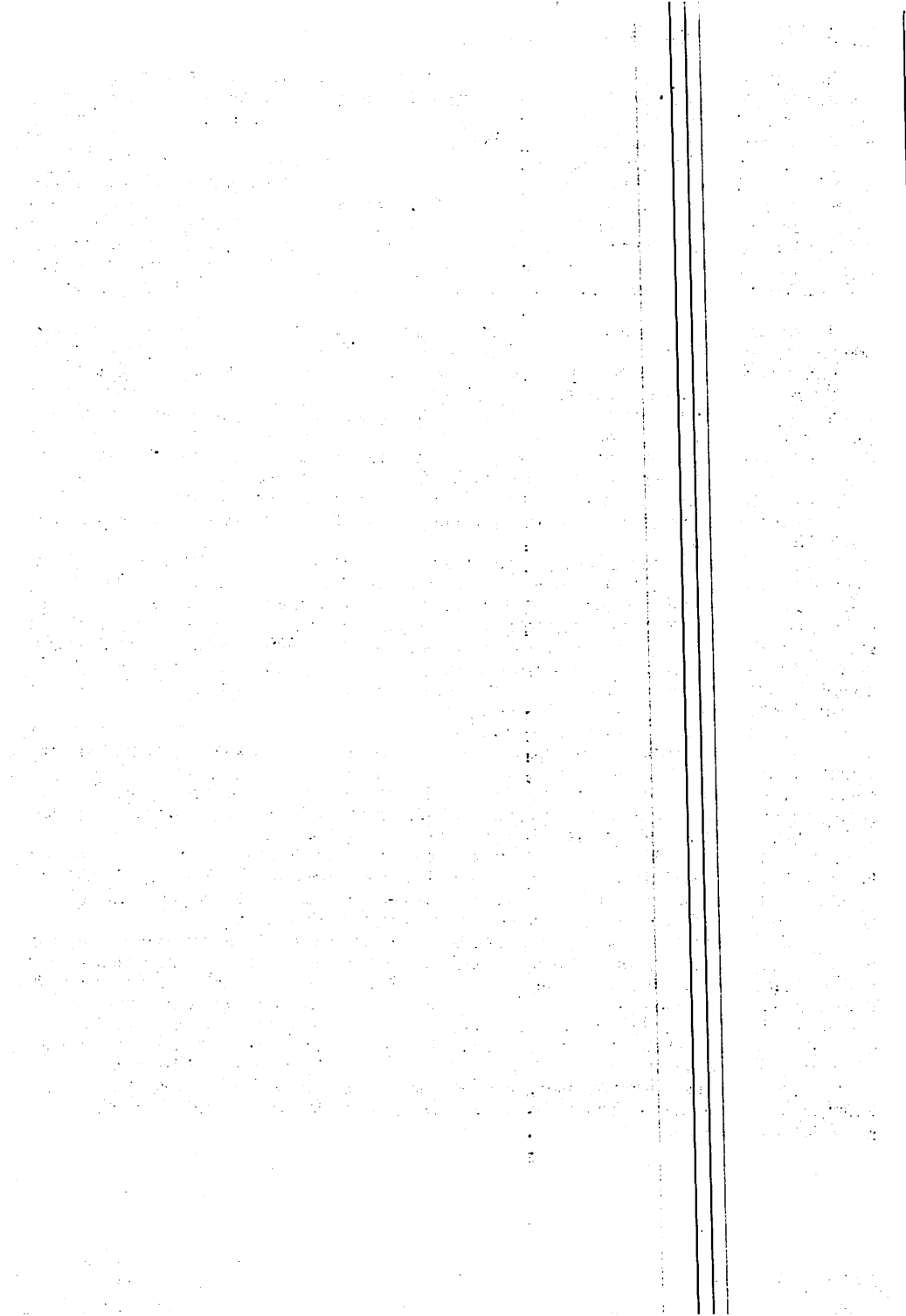
To make a long and interesting story short, the first rails running between Ogden and Salt Lake were laid on September 22, 1869. Seventy men laid 1 1/2 kms (one mile) of track a day during October and November. During the month of December, 150 men worked on the project and the last spike was driven on January 10, 1870, in Salt Lake City. According to Arrington's book, *Great Basin Kingdom*, it states; *freight houses, passenger and freight landings and other facilities at the Utah Central Depots in Salt Lake City and Ogden were completed soon afterward, and locomotives were placed in to operation. Two regular trains ran daily each way between Salt Lake and Ogden, and a third ran each way on Wednesdays, Saturdays, and Sundays.*

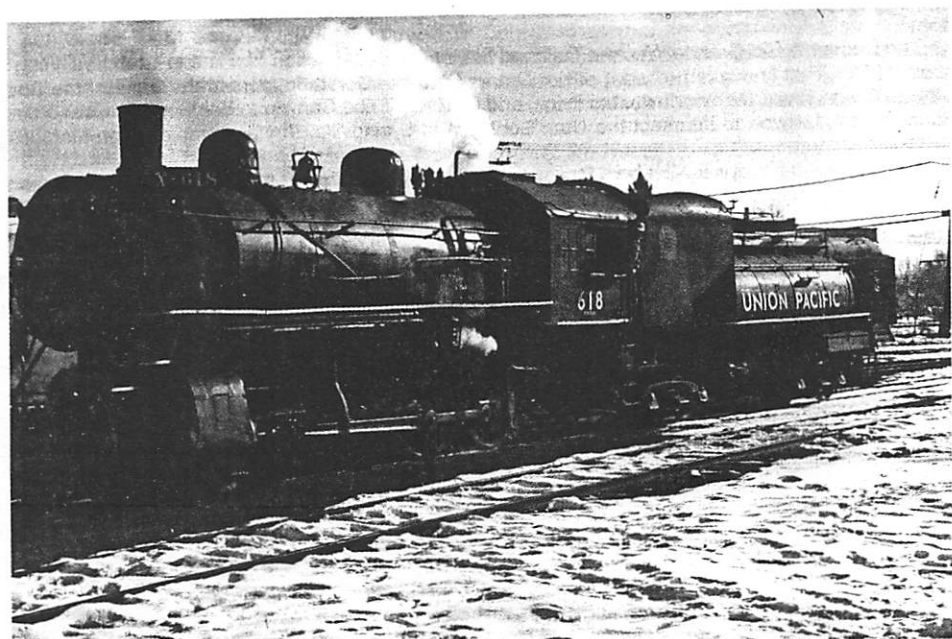
After the completion of the Utah Central Railroad from Ogden to Salt Lake, the next logical step was to run another line south to take in Utah County and points south; also to create spur lines to various mining locations such as the granite quarries in Little Cottonwood Canyon, the copper deposits in Bingham Canyon, and the gold diggings in Upper American Fork Canyon, etc. The first stage of the Utah Southern Railroad was built to Sandy. Work on the first stage was begun in June 1871, and the first 20 kms of line was laid and put into service by September, 1871.

During the winter of 1871-72, contracts were let out for the grading of an extension of the line as far as Lehi, in northern Utah Valley. This part of the line was completed on September, 23, 1872. At about the same time this line was being built, another line was under construction in American Fork Canyon. Read the full story on this under the *History of American Fork Canyon*.

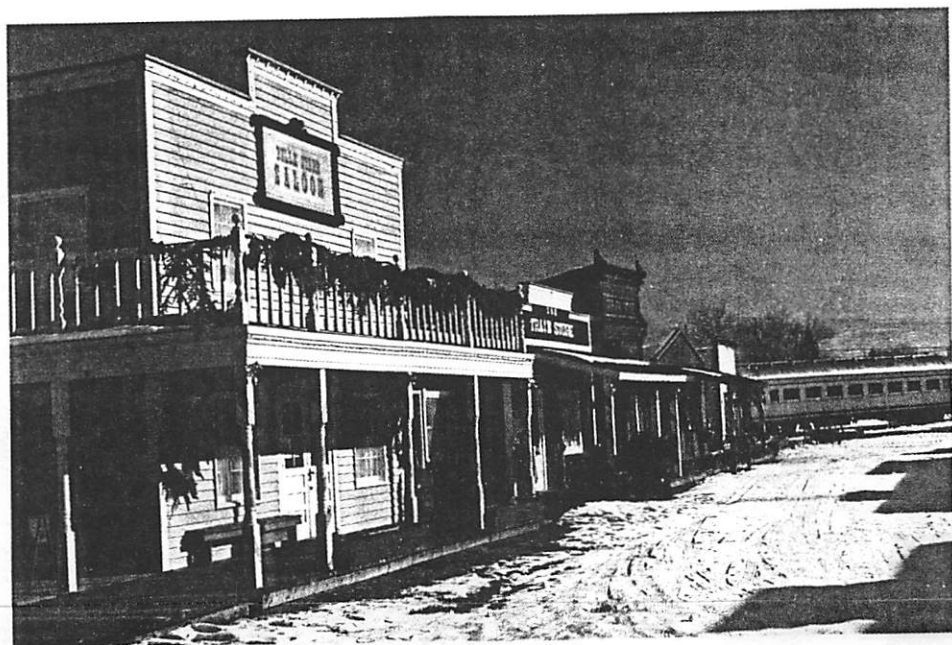
Beyond Lehi there were more political and economic problems. Union Pacific was providing expertise and rolling stock, but the Mormons were providing the labor for the part of the line south of Salt Lake City, which was then called the Utah Southern Railway. Since the Mormons wanted to be a part of the railway through their country, it was agreed that each community would volunteer labor to build the grade of the railroad through each settlement, but would be paid in company stock. Arrington delves rather deeply into the situation in his book. Under this partnership or agreement, the line was completed to American Fork by September 23, 1873, and to Provo by November 28 the same year.

The following fall and winter season, Union Pacific continued the line on down to York in Juab County. Still later the line was extended down to Milford, and west to Frisco in 1880. By 1903, the line was extended to California.





The Heber Creeper steam engine ready for its journey into Provo Canyon.



Heber Creeper Steam Railway Station village complex in Heber.

